United Nations E/CN.3/2010/16

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 December 2009
English
Original: Spanish

Statistical Commission
Forty-first session
23-26 February 2010
Item 3 (m) of the provisional agenda*
Items for discussion and decision: regional statistical development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its fortieth session, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. The Statistical Commission is invited to comment on the report and endorse the proposed course of action.

* E/CN.3/2010/1.

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Report of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean on the development of official statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean

I. Introduction

1. This document was prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and offers a description of the main trends in the development of official statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean and the principal challenges in that regard.[1]

2. The first chapter provides an analysis of the state of development of statistical production in the region, based on statistical information for 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries and eight specific areas. The institutional organization of national statistical systems in the region is also described. Chapter II examines the history and current status of mechanisms for regional and subregional coordination and of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC. Chapter III describes the main challenges for official statistics in the countries of the region and the strategies that the Statistical Conference of the Americas and ECLAC propose to implement in order to address them.

II. State of official statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean

A. Availability of statistical information

3. Latin America and the Caribbean is a very geographically diverse region, with significant cultural differences between countries, as well as differences in size. For the purposes of this report, the region is considered to comprise the countries of South and Central America (including Spanish-speaking island countries), those of the Caribbean (including English- and Dutch-speaking island countries, as well as Guyana and Suriname) and Mexico. Table 1 shows the current status of statistical production in the region in six key areas.

[1] The information on vital statistics, education statistics, ICT statistics and subregional coordination was prepared with the involvement of the Pan American Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America, the Caribbean Community, the Central American Statistical Commission of the Central American Integration System, the Andean Statistics Committee and the Southern Common Market.

Table 1
Availability of statistical information for 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008

		Countries which have carried out a census in the last 10 years		*Existence of a programme of regular employment surveys or multi-purpose surveys*		*Countries whose national accounts base year dates back no more than 10 years*		*Countries that have published environmental statistics*		*Countries that have published ICT statistics*	
	Total	*No.*	*Percentage of the total*	*No.*	*Percentage of the total*	*No.*	*Percentage of the total*	*No.*	*Percentage of the total*	*No.*	*Percentage of the total*
Caribbean	13	13	100	3	23	2	15	—		—	
Latin America	20	19	95	16	80	8	40	14	70	16	80
Latin America and the Caribbean	33	32	97	19	58	10	30	14	42	16	48

Source: ECLAC, based on national data.

4. Table 1 shows that 97 per cent of Latin American and Caribbean countries have conducted a population census in the last 10 years. Some 80 per cent of Latin American countries run a programme of regular household surveys; 40 per cent have national accounts with a base year dating back no more than 10 years; and 35 per cent have a comprehensive vital statistics system. In the areas of the environment and information and communication technologies (ICT), 70 per cent and 80 per cent of the countries, respectively, publish statistics. As might be expected, there are significant differences between geographical areas. The Caribbean countries have made less progress, except in the area of censuses.

B. Development of statistical information in selected areas

Population censuses

5. According to the established schedules, 16 of the 20 Latin American countries and 20 Caribbean countries will conduct their population and housing censuses for the 2010 round between 2010 and 2012. In the most recent census rounds, progress has been made in incorporating new variables of major importance to the region, such as migration, ethnic origin and African descent. Furthermore, some countries have gained experience in using new information and communication technologies, including data capture in the field through the large-scale use of hand-held data capture devices and optical reading of census questionnaire content, and the automatic coding of occupational categories and other variables. Significant progress has also be made in harmonizing the census variables used in different countries, especially through the work undertaken within the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), and by Chile and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

6. The region has also made considerable advances in its use of census data, facilitated by the development of REDATAM (REtrieval of DATa for small Areas by Microcomputer) software. A total of 13 Latin American and 4 Caribbean countries currently allow online census data processing over the Internet. These developments have enabled better use to be made of census data for public policy and research purposes. The opportunity to access specialized databases that allow comparison of

some or even all the countries of the region is another milestone in the dissemination and use of census information in Latin America.

Household surveys

7. Programmes of regular multi-purpose household surveys, or at least employment surveys, are now conducted in nearly all Latin American countries. Over the course of the 1990s and the current decade, these surveys have been gradually strengthened and improved in a number of areas, including their geographical coverage, the quality of survey tools and samples, and the technologies used in each stage of the process. Many Caribbean countries have conducted at least one multi-purpose survey, employment survey or survey of living conditions in recent years, although only three of them run programmes of regular household surveys.

Table 2
Latin America and the Caribbean: household surveys 2000-2009

Countries	*Existence of a programme of regular employment or multi-purpose surveys*	*Date of last survey*				
		Income and expenditure surveys	*Surveys of living conditions*	*Population and/or health surveys*	*Surveys on disability*	*Child labour surveys*
North America and Central America						
Costa Rica	X	2004-2005				2001
Cuba	X		2009			
El Salvador	X	2004-2005			2004	2001
Guatemala			2006		2005	2000
Honduras	X		2004	2005	2002	2002
Mexico	X	2008[a]		2006		2007
Nicaragua		2007	2005	2006	2003	2000
Panama	X	2007-2008	2008		2005	2005
Dominican Republic	X	2006-2007		2007		2000
Caribbean						
Jamaica	X					
Santa Lucia	X					
Trinidad and Tobago	X					

Countries	*Existence of a programme of regular employment or multi-purpose surveys*	*Date of last survey*				
		Income and expenditure surveys	*Surveys of living conditions*	*Population and/or health surveys*	*Surveys on disability*	*Child labour surveys*
South America						
Argentina	X	2004-2005				
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	X	2003-2004	2008	2008	2001	2004
Brazil	X	2002-2003				2008
Colombia	X	2006-2007	2007	2005		2001
Chile	X	2006-2007	2006			2001
Ecuador	X	2005-2006	2005-2006		2004	2004
Paraguay	X	2005-2006			2004	2006
Peru	X	2009	2009	2009		2007
Uruguay	X	2005-2006			2003	2003
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	X	2004-2005		2009		2000

Source: ECLAC, based on national data.

[a] In the period 2000-2008, Mexico conducted five income and expenditure surveys.

8. The region has also gained experience in conducting income and expenditure surveys. Table 2 shows that nearly all countries have conducted at least one such survey in the current decade. Some Caribbean countries have also recently conducted income and expenditure surveys, although their capacity to do so regularly has been more limited.

9. The progress made in the area of household surveys has been achieved as a result of major efforts by the countries, supported by contributions from such donor agencies as the Programme for the Improvement of Surveys and the Measurement of Living Conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean (MECOVI), a joint undertaking of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). ECLAC has a long tradition of providing countries with regular support in this area, through technical assistance and capacity-building missions, as well as the promotion of forums for discussion and exchange of experiences. The International Labour Organization (ILO) also collaborates through its work on the measurement of labour indicators.

National accounts and economic statistics

10. Considerable progress towards implementation of the System of National Accounts, 1993 (1993 SNA) has been made since 2001. Eighteen new countries have adopted the recommendations, bringing to 22 the total number that now use

that methodology as a framework for calculating their macroeconomic statistics.[2] Nonetheless, most countries in the region do not yet have a full set of estimated tables.

11. The most significant achievements have been recorded in the area of origin and use of goods and services and in the calculation of gross domestic product (GDP) by components of expenditure (although only 12 countries have supply and use tables for periods after 2000 and only 10 publish them). Eight countries publish institutional sector accounts, and only two countries have begun preparing balance sheets of assets and liabilities for institutional sectors. With regard to institutional sector accounts, non-financial corporations, households and non-profit institutions pose the greatest difficulties, and adequate information is not always available for general government. Concerning quarterly estimates, little more than half of the countries in the region have systems to track quarterly macroeconomic data on GDP by sector and by expenditure. Even fewer have experience in producing what are known as extensions to the central framework: few countries have satellite accounts for tourism, the environment and other specific fields such as health, education and culture.

Gender statistics

12. A growing number of Latin American countries have systems of gender indicators, while the others have embarked on major processes to compile information on gender disparities and disaggregate data by sex (see table 3). Significant progress has also been made on the implementation of time-use measurements; since 2001, 18 time-use surveys have been conducted.

Table 3
Advances in gender indicator systems at the national level

Country	*Type of information*	*Inter-agency agreements*
Argentina	National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) gender indicators	
Brazil	National Gender Information System/Gender Equality Observatory	Between the Special Department for Women's Policies of the Office of the President of the Republic, the Brazilian Geographical and Statistical Institute and other public-sector institutions
Chile	Gender statistics from 1992-2002 censuses online	

[2] See "América Latina y el Caribe: Series históricas de estadísticas económicas 1950-2008", Cuadernos Estadísticos 37 (Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2009); available at http://www.eclac.cl/deype/cuaderno37/index.htm.

Country	*Type of information*	*Inter-agency agreements*
Colombia	Gender Affairs Observatory (Act 1009 of 2006)	
Costa Rica	Preliminary proposal for a gender indicator system	Between the National Institute of Statistics and Census and the National Institute of Women
Cuba	Database with available information	Between the Federation of Cuban Women and the National Statistical Office
Ecuador	System of social indicators on the situation of women and gender inequalities (SIMUJERES) within Ecuador's integrated system of social indicators	Between the National Women's Council and the National Statistics and Census Institute
El Salvador	Integration of a gender perspective in the sixth national population census and the fifth housing census, held in 2007	Between the General Directorate of Statistics and Censuses and the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development
Guatemala	System of indicators for gender analysis	Between the National Statistical Institute and the Department of Women's Affairs of the Office of the President
Haiti	Inclusion of gender indicators in national surveys	Between the Ministry for the Status of Women and Women's Rights and the Haitian Institute of Statistics and Information
Honduras	National system of information on women and girls	Between the National Statistical Institute and the National Institute of Women (INAM), with the cooperation of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and through the Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC
Mexico	System of indicators for monitoring the status of women in Mexico	Between the National Statistics and Geography Institute (INEGI) and the National Institute of Women (INMUJERES)

Country	*Type of information*	*Inter-agency agreements*
Nicaragua	System of gender-based indicators	Between the Nicaraguan Institute of Women and the National Statistics and Census Institute
Panama	System of gender-based indicators	Network of public and civil society agencies that produce and use statistical information
Paraguay		Agreement being prepared between the Department of Women's Affairs and the Department of Statistics, Surveys and Censuses
Peru	Sector statistics with gender indicators — National Strategic Plan for Statistical Development (PENDES) 2008-2012	Between the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development and the National Institute of Statistics and Information
Dominican Republic	Women's Observatory	Between the Department of Women's Affairs and the National Statistical Institute for the production of gender statistics
Uruguay	Gender Information System	
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)		Between the National Institute of Women (INAMUJER) and the National Statistical Institute

Source: ECLAC, based on national data.

13. Cooperation between producers and users of gender statistics — especially between the national statistical offices, national mechanisms for the advancement of women and a growing number of sector ministries — has been gradually institutionalized in most countries.

14. In May 1999, ECLAC prepared a system of gender indicators for the follow-up and evaluation of the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001, and the Beijing Platform for Action. By coordinating the establishment of the Gender Equality Observatory of Latin America and the Caribbean as a bridge between users and producers of gender statistics, ECLAC has implemented the mandate of the Statistical Conference of the Americas jointly with the mandate established by the Quito Consensus.

15. There are, however, information gaps with respect to particular population groups, either because the sources are not representative enough to disaggregate at those levels or the questionnaires or statistical records do not include questions that

identify members of those groups. This makes it difficult to measure gender gaps by ethnic identity, disability and migrant, refugee or displaced status, among others.

Vital statistics

16. All countries have vital statistics systems that regularly produce data on births and deaths, but there are coverage and quality issues. In 7 of the 25 countries for which information is available, coverage is good (over 85 per cent of births and deaths) throughout the national territory, while another seven countries have coverage levels of roughly 50 per cent. Quality issues, however, are more common to all the countries. Lack of information about the age of mothers, children's birth weight, place of residence, socio-economic characteristics of the parties (parents of newborn or stillborn babies, deceased adults), or imprecise or non-existent information about cause of death impede countries' understanding of the true levels of risk and incidence of disease, and hinder the formulation of epidemiological mortality profiles.

17. As regards morbidity statistics, resources and services, there are substantial differences between the countries of the region. Low coverage in some geographical areas and fields, such as social security or the private sector, is a common problem that prevents the compilation of comprehensive, accurate and reliable information for formulating health policy.

18. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has prepared a plan of action for strengthening vital and health statistics, aimed at addressing and overcoming these limitations. The plan has already produced results: a majority of countries involved have used the diagnostic tools proposed in the plan, and a number of countries have formulated strategic plans for strengthening vital statistics and health data systems.

Education statistics

19. During the current decade, the majority of countries in the region have significantly improved their production of education statistics and indicators and have been able to overcome the main shortcomings that previously existed: the persistent lack of basic information, isolation of education statistics units from decision-making processes, little use of the information produced, lack of venues for exchanging standardized information and methodologies and lack of institutional leadership at the regional and international levels. The spread of low-cost information and communications technology was one of the contributing factors. A role was also played by new projects on internationally comparable education indicators for monitoring the commitments undertaken by the international community, such as the Education for All programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations, and the creation in 1999 of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), which is responsible for overseeing the production of official education statistics within the United Nations system and the international community.

20. The developments described above are reflected in the availability of several key indicators for monitoring the MDGs, as shown in table 4.

Table 4
Coverage of key indicators for monitoring MDGs in education (weighted by covered population), 2009 annual survey

Net enrolment ratio in primary education (percentage)*	*Index of parity between the sexes in the gross enrolment ratios (percentage)***		
	Primary	*Secondary*	*Tertiary*
91	95	95	82

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).
* Official indicator for monitoring Goal 2 of the MDGs.
** Indicators used for monitoring Goal 3 of the MDGs.

21. In addition to the new challenges posed by the demands of the sector, some of the previous issues persist. In light of this fact, there are several ongoing initiatives providing training and assistance for national technical teams, including a UIS initiative which coordinates its efforts with other agencies operating in the region.

Environmental statistics

22. Considerable progress has been made in the current decade in institutionalizing environmental statistics. By 2008, 21 countries had programmes on environmental statistics, while 14 of the 28 national entities had a unit dedicated solely to that issue. Sixteen countries had environmental statistics publications.

23. This progress demonstrates the growing importance of environmental statistics in the region, which translates into a higher degree of institutional development, particularly for national statistical offices. There are still significant gaps, however. Firstly, environmental statistics units or programmes in the statistical offices should be strengthened and provided with appropriate financial and human resources. There is also a low level of collaboration between statistical offices and environmental ministries or departments and insufficient training of existing human resources. Lastly, it is very important to promote use of the definitions, concepts and classifications found in the system of integrated environmental and economic accounting as a conceptual framework for developing basic statistics.

Statistics on information and communications technologies (ICT)

24. In recent years there has been significant progress in the production of harmonized statistics and indicators on ICT access and usage. In 2004, only 15 countries in Latin America had indicators on Internet access and three had indicators on Internet usage based on information from household surveys, while those numbers have now increased to 18 and 15, respectively. This type of information is less readily available in the Caribbean, given that in 2004, only two countries had indicators on Internet access and the same number had indicators on Internet usage. Those figures are now six and five, respectively. Eleven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have incorporated questions on ICT in business surveys and in more than half of the countries statistics on these technologies are a regular part of surveys conducted by the national statistical offices.

25. This process has received significant support from the Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC).[3]

26. One factor that has facilitated this progress has been the approval by the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC of the compendium of practices. OSILAC is currently reviewing the 2009 version of the compendium, and has noted that 20 countries in the region (15 in Latin America and 5 in the Caribbean) have adopted at least one indicator on ICT access and one on ICT usage from among the indicators suggested by the Observatory. The Working Group on Information and Communications Technologies of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, in collaboration with OSILAC, is developing a regional proposal on key indicators for education and e-government.

C. Organization of statistical systems in the countries of the region

27. Most statistical systems in Latin America and the Caribbean are organized around a national statistical office,[4] which is usually created under a special law or as part of legislation on statistical functions in the country. Most national statistical systems are decentralized as regards the production and dissemination of statistics and centralized as regards normative aspects, with the national statistical office issuing guidelines and steering the system as a whole.

28. According to the results of a recent self-assessment survey on best statistical practices, to which 19 countries responded, the following are some of the characteristics of national statistical systems:[5]

(a) In 100 per cent of cases, the mandate to compile data for the production of statistics is specified under the law and statistical secrecy is guaranteed in national legislation;

(b) In 84 per cent of cases, statistical offices have a strategic or long-term plan for surveys (five years or more);

(c) In 42 per cent of cases, the head of the statistical office is appointed through a public competitive recruitment process;

(d) In nine cases, the head of the statistical office is a senior civil servant (non-political), and in two countries that person is a government minister.

29. In that connection, the Statistical Conference of the Americas has described some of the weaknesses of national statistical systems as follows:[6]

(a) In many countries of the region, the coverage, quality and transparency of national statistics are still not at the level of best international practices, which means that they cannot be used as a basis for developing a reputation for excellence for official statistics among users, economic stakeholders, social actors and decision makers;

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[3] See www.eclac.cl/tic/flash.

[4] Only two countries in Latin America have departments or divisions responsible for producing and disseminating statistics within a ministry.

[5] Report on the development and adoption of the Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.3075(CEA.5/13).

[6] See 2005-2015, strategic plan, in document LC/L.2575/Rev.1 of 22 December 2006.

(b) In some cases, national statistical offices of the region lack an adequate institutional and legal framework;

(c) In many cases, the statistical offices operate without sufficient information technology and human and financial resources.

30. In recent years, significant changes have been implemented which reflect the institutional strengthening of national statistical systems. The transformation of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI) into a fully autonomous institution governed by a board of directors appointed by the President of the Republic and the Senate, and backed by a statistical law that allows it to effectively exercise its lead role throughout the national statistical system, is an extraordinary achievement and a very encouraging example for the development of statistics in the region. The introduction in some countries of publicly managed systems in which senior management positions in statistical offices are filled through a competitive recruitment mechanism is also noteworthy.

31. Nevertheless, the serious institutional weaknesses that persist and the lack of sustainability of these processes in a number of countries present significant challenges. Technical capacities must therefore be increased and greater independence given to budgetary management. The Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC has taken up this call and, with the collaboration of ECLAC and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT), is driving forward the project to prepare a code of good practice in statistics.

III. Regional coordination

A. Brief history

32. The efforts made by Governments and specialized agencies to improve the regional coordination of official statistics date back several decades. The Inter-American Statistical Institute was established in 1940. A major landmark was the creation by the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1950 of the Inter-American Statistical Conference as one of its specialized conferences. The Conference met on a regular basis until 1996 with collaboration from the Institute.

33. The first technical meeting of directors of statistics of Latin America and the Caribbean was organized by ECLAC in 1989, thus meeting the need for a technical forum for the heads of statistical offices at a time when the Inter-American Statistical Conference of OAS was facing serious financial problems. In the end, on 17 September 1998, the OAS Permanent Executive Committee of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development decided to discontinue the Inter-American Statistical Conference and urged the member States of OAS to pursue their coordination efforts in the field of statistics through a single entity within the framework of ECLAC.

B. The Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

34. The Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC is a subsidiary body of ECLAC and has the following objectives according to Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/7:

(a) Promote the development and improvement of national statistics and work to ensure that they are comparable internationally, bearing in mind the recommendations of the United Nations Statistical Commission, the specialized agencies and other relevant organizations;

(b) Promote international, regional and bilateral cooperation among national offices and international and regional agencies;

(c) Draw up a biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities to meet the demands of the countries of the region, subject to the availability of resources.

35. Conferences are held twice a year and meetings of the executive committee, comprised of representatives of seven member States of ECLAC,[7] are held in the periods between. Members of the executive committee serve two-year terms and their main function is to promote and monitor the implementation of the agreements reached at the conference. A biennial programme of work is established for each cycle and in 2005 agreement was reached on a strategic plan for the period 2005-2015, which provides the framework for the biennial programmes. According to the strategic plan, the main challenges for national statistical systems in the region between now and 2015 lie in developing an appropriate information system for monitoring progress towards achievement of the MDGs, preparing and conducting the 2010 round of population censuses, and implementing the System of National Accounts (2008) in all the countries of the region.

36. A number of representatives of countries and regional and international organizations take part in the working groups that have been established to implement the provisions of the strategic plan and many of the activities in the biennial programmes. ECLAC or another organization usually provides secretariat support for the working groups. In some cases, resources are provided by certain agencies and/or under projects that are drawn up within the framework of the Conference and then submitted to donor agencies for funding. The following working groups are currently operating:

(a) *Working Group on Censuses*. This Group undertakes support activities for the countries of the region in preparation for the 2010 census round. Exchanges of experience have been organized and progress has been made in harmonizing some of the census variables. Meetings were held, for example, on measuring people's ethnic origin, internal and international migration and other forms of territorial mobility, and operational aspects of cartography. Funding has been made available for these activities by IDB and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA);

[7] A number of ECLAC member States are not from Latin America or the Caribbean. They play an active role in the conference and some are members or have been members of the executive committee.

(b) *Working Group on Institution-building*. This Group has been working on promoting the harmonization of social statistics, for which it has received funding from IDB. At the fifth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, it was decided that the Group should focus its activities on preparing, with support from ECLAC and EUROSTAT, a proposal for a code of good statistical practices for Latin America and the Caribbean on promoting the use of international standards;

(c) *Working Group on Gender Statistics*. The work of this Group focuses on three areas: (i) the development of capacities to produce high-quality gender statistics; (ii) the strengthening of ties between the producers and users of gender statistics; and (iii) the promotion of international development cooperation and the dissemination of gender statistics. It has promoted exchanges of experiences, discussions on common definitions and/or approaches, technical assistance and training in matters such as time-use surveys, statistics on violence against women and household satellite accounts (with regard to measuring the contribution of unpaid work). It receives support from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and from ECLAC, as the technical secretariat;

(d) *Working Group on Migration and Trends in Remittances*. This Group has looked into the methods used in the region to measure international remittances and has analysed ways to improve these procedures. It has headed an IDB-financed project that has facilitated the Group's work;

(e) *Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals*. This Group has geared its work towards analysing the definitions and methodologies of the indicators that have been established for monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. It has focused on analysing the differences that tend to arise between the estimates made by countries and those made by international organizations. An agenda is being drawn up for bringing about the reconciliation of these differences. The Group has also promoted greater participation of national statistical offices in the preparation of national reports on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. This Group has received financial support for its activities from IDB and ECLAC, as the technical secretariat.

(f) *Working Group on National Accounts*. The Group carries out activities to improve the basic economic statistics and estimates used in national accounts in the region. It has performed a diagnosis of the current situation and drawn up a set of proposals for creating a programme to link the activities carried out by countries and international agencies, with a view to addressing the difficulties encountered in producing primary economic data. ECLAC acts as the technical secretariat;

(g) *Working Group on Information and Communications Technologies*. The Group serves as a discussion forum on the measurement of access to and use of information and communications technologies, and seeks to contribute to the development of their comparability at the regional level. The Group has closely coordinated its activities with OSILAC. It has also undertaken activities to further the discussion and dissemination of proposals made at the global level and to generate awareness of the experiences of developing countries;

(h) One important initiative was the transformation of the Working Group on Human Resource Education and Training into the Knowledge Transfer Network. The Network is a collaborative system that includes the various training centres of

the national statistical offices and other resources available to support training, and works to coordinate, promote and disseminate statistical training activities that are of interest to statistics officials in the region. For this purpose, it has set up a board of directors and a basic coordinating unit, financed partially by the World Bank and is located in the offices of INEGI in Mexico. Organizational and financial support for the Network's activities has been provided by the National Statistics Institute of Spain;

(i) *Working Group on Environmental Statistics*. This Group was formed recently and aims to promote the regular production of environmental statistics in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean through the dissemination of experiences from outside the region and the exchange of national experiences within it. It is supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and by ECLAC as the technical secretariat;

(j) *Working Group on Poverty*. This Group, which was created at the most recent Conference, aims to further the harmonization of the methodology used to measure poverty in terms of income in the region. Using the proposed new methodology that is to be completed by ECLAC by early 2010 and the methods used by several countries to produce their national estimates, the Group will put forward a set of recommendations to improve the interregional comparability of measurements.

37. In order to facilitate and promote inter-agency coordination and cooperation and to optimize their contribution to capacity-building in national statistical systems, the Conference has developed, through ECLAC, a database of statistical cooperation activities carried out by international organizations in the region, classified by subject area and organization.[8]

C. Subregional coordination mechanisms

Statistics development in MERCOSUR[9]

38. MERCOSUR, which has been in existence for almost two decades, has been promoting the development, harmonization, validation and dissemination of statistical information among its member countries. In the work leading up to the first Convention on Statistics, for example, the directors of the national statistical institutes of MERCOSUR (including Chile) signed a framework agreement on the coordination and harmonization of statistics in which they affirmed their willingness to proceed with the harmonization of statistics in different fields. There is no common statistics policy, however, for guiding statistics activities in accordance with the needs of the regional integration process. Nor is there an institutional structure for statistics in MERCOSUR, which means that there are no commonly applied norms.

39. The cooperation received from the European Union since 1998 has facilitated statistical harmonization activities. These include regional and itinerant workshops, meetings (usually biannual), local and international technical assistance, internships

[8] See http://websie.eclac.cl/StatisticalActivities/index.asp.

[9] The member countries of MERCOSUR are Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, while Chile is an associate member and participates in several aspects of statistical coordination.

and studies. Various working groups have been set up. These consist of experts and officials from national statistical institutes and/or central banks of the region that work in the same area, and they are each responsible for presenting progress reports on their area.

40. The harmonization of the statistical output of the member States of MERCOSUR is facing some difficulties, mainly owing to inequalities in the availability of resources, the lack of prior experience in statistical harmonization within an integration process and unfavourable environment caused by the absence of a common institutional framework for statistics.

The Statistical Commission of the Central American Integration System (SICA)

41. The Statistical Commission of SICA was set up as an international cooperation initiative promoted by the directors and managers of the statistics and census offices of Central America.

42. The constitution of the Central American Statistical Commission of SICA (CENTROESTAD) was signed at the thirty-third Regular Meeting of Heads of State and Government of SICA in late 2008.

43. The objectives of CENTROESTAD are to: (a) facilitate the development of a regional statistical system; (b) generate up-to-date and timely regional statistical information based on information provided by national and regional institutions; and (c) standardize methodologies and definitions to allow for the comparability and aggregation of statistical data in Central America and the Dominican Republic, in keeping with international principles and in accordance with universally applied procedures and techniques.

44. The member countries are already carrying out preliminary coordination activities such as the drafting of the regulations of CENTROESTAD and the preparation of a 2009-2011 pluriannual plan based on the seven areas of integration. The purpose of the plan is to address the requirements of the various departments and specialized institutions that make up SICA for indicators and statistics and thus assist them in their regional decision-making.

The Andean Statistics Committee[10]

45. The Andean Statistics Committee is the permanent technical support and advisory body to the Commission or General Secretariat of the Andean Community and is responsible for issuing non-binding technical opinions on issues related to community statistics. The goal of the Committee is to foster improvements in economic, social, demographic and environmental statistics and to harmonize concepts, definitions, minimum contents, methodologies and their presentation.

46. The Committee comprises the highest authorities of the national statistical systems of member countries. The presidency is held by the highest authority of the national statistical office of the country that assumes the presidency of the Andean Presidential Council. There is a statistical office in the General Secretariat of the Andean Community.

[10] The member countries are Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

47. The Committee has a Community Statistics Programme for the period 2008-2013, which sets out a strategic vision of the statistics that are to be produced throughout the Community during that period in response to the demands of the Andean integration process.

48. The Andean Community has developed community legislation on statistics, consisting of decisions and resolutions that have the status of supranational laws on social, economic and environmental statistics, manuals, nomenclature, directories and other matters.

49. In addition, the Andean Centre for Training in Statistics has been established as a coordination mechanism and national statistics training centres have been set up as the executing agencies for training programmes and policy.

The Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

50. When CARICOM was established in 1973, a formal mechanism for statistical coordination, the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians, was created. The Committee meets annually and its membership is comprised of all the directors of statistics of the CARICOM member countries.

51. The Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians was initially established to monitor intraregional trade and to build national capacities for the generation of foreign trade statistics. This limited mandate was subsequently broadened to include coordination tasks in areas such as national accounts, population and housing censuses, social and gender statistics and, more recently, environmental statistics.

52. The statistics programme of the CARICOM secretariat, which provides technical support to the Standing Committee, also carries out tasks aimed at coordinating and promoting statistics activities in the subregion in a number of the fields mentioned in paragraph 51.

IV. Main challenges and strategies for the development of statistics in the region

A. Main challenges

53. Over the next several years, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean will face various challenges in developing the production and dissemination of official statistics. Although these challenges affect the region as a whole, they do not affect its various countries in the same way or with the same impact, given the significant differences between the levels of development achieved by their national statistical systems.

Statistical production

54. *Census data.* Exploiting census information continues to be a challenge because users are increasingly demanding higher levels of disaggregation, greater precision and the georeferencing of data, especially at the local level. These challenges share a common problem, namely, the region-wide shortage at all levels of human resources trained in demography and population and development studies.

Attempts are being made to make up for this shortfall with isolated initiatives and limited financial resources, in the absence of a coordinated regional strategy.

55. *Vital statistics*. The main priority is to implement an action plan aimed at rapidly increasing the coverage of vital statistics records, along with improving the quality of the data collected, especially as regards the mother's age, the child's birth weight, place of residence and the socioeconomic characteristics of the persons involved in the demographic event.

56. *Household surveys*. Despite the major advances made, challenges remain in the areas of institution-building and the sustainability of household survey programmes, especially in the Caribbean, as well as in technical areas such as the design and implementation of surveys and the analytical capacity of statistical institutions. Factors such as institutional weakness, lack of resources to drive statistical development, and staff turnover seem to conspire against this objective. Also, most countries do not yet apply the Integrated Household Survey System concept.

57. *National accounts and economic statistics*. The availability and quality of basic statistics for preparing accounts for goods and services present serious challenges in many countries. In recent years, priority has been given to sector-specific surveys rather than to economic censuses because of cost considerations and ease of processing. This indicates the need for directories of production units covering the entire formal production system. The broad range of informal or unstructured production units poses an additional difficulty since it is particularly complicated to capture their transactions. The adoption of the *2008 System of National Accounts (SNA)* represents a new challenge for the countries of the region and highlights the need to redouble efforts to implement the *1993 SNA* definitively and to modernize national account systems. The increase in the production of short-term indicators and their timely dissemination is another immediate challenge to be met.

58. *Gender statistics*. The greatest challenges facing the countries of the region involve statistical information in key areas, such as the participation of women at all levels of decision-making, poverty with a gender perspective, paid and unpaid work performed by women, time use, and violence against women. This is particularly true of the Caribbean countries. Moreover, major information gaps exist with respect to certain population groups, which makes it difficult to identify gender gaps by ethnic identity or by disability, migrant, refugee or displaced person status, among others.

59. *Education statistics*. It is necessary to improve data on private educational institutions, teachers, education spending, early childhood education and higher education, as well as to increase the availability of metadata. There is also a need for analytical reports that explain and interpret the information produced, for the integration of different sources of information in education — particularly in human resources, investment and knowledge assessment — and for the development of policies to disseminate the information produced. Other important objectives include improving institutional integration between ministries of education and statistical institutes, and strengthening and training the human resources involved in statistical processes.

60. *Environmental statistics*. The availability and quality of environmental data need to be improved, and environmental data compiled and systematically processed in official statistical series. To achieve this, capacity-building programmes need to be established, which requires developing metadata and methodological documents, and strengthening inter-institutional mechanisms.

61. *Statistics on information and communications technologies*. There are two main challenges in this area. The first is to increase efforts to compile statistics on ICT access and usage. This requires further strengthening of technical assistance and capacity-building programmes, especially in countries that have yet to adopt the system of harmonized ICT measurements and those that have not incorporated the internationally recommended key indicators. It is also necessary to promote the use of statistical information in formulating and evaluating ICT policies and in diagnostic studies and decision-making.

Dissemination and interaction with users

62. A major challenge is to improve and expand the dissemination of available statistics and indicators geared both to specialists and to the public at large, and generalizing the use of digital media and the Internet are vital to achieving this goal. This is closely related to another priority in this area, which is to increase the use of available data and statistics for the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies.

63. Promoting dialogue between the producers and users of statistics is key to improving the quality, relevance and use of official statistics in the region. Fostering such a dialogue will also help to increase awareness among policymakers of the need to strengthen national statistical systems.

National statistical systems

64. Strengthening the legal and institutional framework of national statistical systems continues to be an important priority for many countries of the region. This will allow professional independence and self-management capabilities at statistical offices to be strengthened.

65. In addition, it is vital to provide statistical offices with the human, financial and technological resources they need to meet their objectives and goals. In many countries, not only does the amount of resources available to statistical offices need to be increased, but budgetary sustainability also needs to be ensured. This would allow them to design and implement medium- and long-term programmes while relying on a core professional and technical staff to help improve the quality of official statistics.

B. The strategy of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and role of the Statistical Conference of the Americas in meeting challenges

66. The ECLAC statistical programme is guided by a three-pronged strategy: (i) promoting best practices in statistics and disseminating and adapting international standards; (ii) providing assistance aimed at strengthening the technical and institutional capacities of the region's statistical systems; and (iii) development of

methodologies. These lines of action are coordinated with the 2005-2015 strategic plan of the Conference, for which ECLAC acts as the technical secretariat.

67. ECLAC carries out a variety of specific activities to achieve progress in the above areas. These activities take into account the thematic priorities established by the Conference. ECLAC has been providing ongoing support to countries in the conduct of population censuses, regular programmes of household surveys and gender and national accounts statistics, among other areas. To this end, it undertakes technical assistance missions and organizes training courses and technical meetings, with the active participation of representatives from the countries concerned. In all of these activities, the Commission cooperates closely with other international agencies working in these areas and promotes horizontal assistance among the countries, given the different levels of statistical development in Latin American and Caribbean countries. In terms of the development of methodologies, ECLAC has continued its work on developing methods for measuring poverty and social cohesion that are appropriate to the region. ECLAC also implements or supports programmes that are global in scope. For example, it has been involved in international efforts to improve the indicators used to monitor progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and it will be coordinating the price-comparison activities of the International Comparison Programme.

68. The establishment of a code of good practices adapted to the realities of the region is another central aspect of the strategy pursued by the Conference and by ECLAC. This objective is central to the concerns of this strategy, which is to advocate that Governments give greater priority to the strengthening of the legal and institutional framework and provide increased funding for statistical development in the countries of the region.

V. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

69. **The Commission may wish to:**

(a) **Comment on the measures being adopted by the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to further the development of statistics, particularly their key achievements and most urgent issues;**

(b) **Comment on the role of the Statistical Conference of the Americas and on the 2005-2015 strategic plan;**

(c) **Make suggestions concerning the operation of the working groups;**

(d) **Advise on the challenge, for statistical offices, of raising the visibility and priority of official statistics in the public agendas of policymakers;**

(e) **Provide guidance on the strategy to promote and strengthen cooperation between the international agencies and organizations developing statistical programmes in the region.**